

Dear Senator,

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related bills

I am a mother of 2 children both born at home with the support of my husband and my truly wonderful midwife Betty Vella. I realize that homebirth is not everybody's choice but for me it was the only way I felt happy and confident to birth. In my normal life I like to have my own space and although not shy am always happier in quieter settings and smaller groups, so for my children's birth I knew that to be in safe and familiar surroundings with people I know and trust around me, creating a calm relaxed environment was exactly what I needed. I have never been anti the medical system and by choosing homebirth am by no means shunning it, just choosing to only use it when there is a medical problem - pregnancy and birth are not a medical problem. Both of my children have been born at 43 weeks totally healthy, something that would not have been allowed in hospital, yet this is obviously just my gestation period. Also my 1st son was born breech, again something that would not have been allowed in hospital, yet at home I had a totally smooth, easy birth with no complications and a perfectly healthy baby. Not only do I want to have more children that I would be devastated to not be allowed to have at home, but I feel so strongly that it is a crime to take this opportunity away from the women and girls of our future and to teach them to believe that birth is something to fear rather than see as a natural and joyous experience. The homebirth midwives are not only fantastic, committed, supportive and loving people but they are also a valuable resource to this country that should be being used and learnt from not pushed aside.

I am concerned at the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009, the Midwives Professional Indemnity (Commonwealth Contribution) Scheme Bill 2009 and the Midwives Professional Indemnity (Runoff Cover Support Payment) Bill 2009, which are currently the subject of an Inquiry by the Committee on Community Affairs.

The bills expand the role of midwives in the provision of maternity services, but exclude midwives who attend births at home. By excluding these midwives, the Government is effectively making attended homebirth illegal. This is because, under the proposed National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, due to be implemented in July 2010, any midwife who cannot obtain insurance cannot be registered. Laws in many states make it a criminal act for an unregistered midwife to attend a birth, and the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme also imposes a fine for doing so.

If enacted, rules made under the bills before the Parliament will make it illegal for a qualified midwife to attend a homebirth in Australia. Such a move is dangerous for mothers and babies, bucks international trends in

maternity care, and is inconsistent with the Government's stated policy of providing pregnant women with greater choice and less interventionist maternity care.

With extremely high intervention rates in hospital, many women are afraid to birth in hospitals and believe their only chance at natural childbirth is at home. If it becomes illegal for registered, highly skilled midwives to care for these women, many will feel they have no option other than to birth unattended. This legislation unintentionally promotes this practice, which is directly contrary to the World Health Organization's objective of having a skilled attendant at every birth. I am extremely concerned that the legislation will result in unnecessary deaths of babies and mothers, and may also result in midwives being fined and jailed if they assist labouring women. This is an absurd situation in a modern democracy.

In the UK, New Zealand, Canada and The Netherlands, homebirth is publicly funded and supported. I am not aware of another country in the world where a midwife can be jailed for attending a homebirth.

Australian women must all be entitled to the same Medicare support wherever they give birth, and midwives must all be entitled to obtain professional indemnity insurance wherever they work.

Yours sincerely

[Chloe Stanford]